

Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

• COMMUNICATIONS • OPPORTUNITIES • EQUALITY •

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 13, 2020

The Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RICDHH) is proud to announce the launch of its Healthcare System Transformation Project (HSTP) entitled, *Improving Healthcare Access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals*. This \$646,192 grant will be led by RICDHH, a designated Vital State Health Program.

Since passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, healthcare providers have been mandated to provide effective communication for their patients. Despite the legislation, statistics show that the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community struggles with significant medical and behavioral health inequities, due largely to lack of effective communication and little understanding in the health system of the DHH culture. The situation is particularly acute in primary and behavioral healthcare settings. Yet, this is also where a strong relationship between provider and patient is known to be critical in improving chronic disease management and reducing inappropriate, unnecessary and more costly healthcare services.

With little accessible information and support available, DHH individuals often find themselves at a disadvantage when trying to navigate the healthcare system. Data is scant. What *is* known is that condition-related outcomes among the DHH population are likely to be worse than those of hearing people with the same condition because of inequities in access to healthcare, health information, education and economic resources.

Working in partnership with Rhode Island College (RIC), RICDHH seeks to accomplish three goals that will improve access to medical and behavioral health services where they can be of most benefit: Accountable Entities (AE). Funding from the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) will support:

1. Data collection and analysis of health status, outcomes and costs in the DHH population;
2. Development of a series of on-site workshops and presentations for the AE workforce and other key stakeholders to improve understanding and knowledge of the DHH culture and ways to improve health services for the DHH population;
3. Development and implementation of the state's first Public Health Interpreter Program to train future and incumbent healthcare workers on how to work closely with DHH patients to overcome the lack of access they now experience.

This partnership intends to improve health outcomes and the cost of care among the DHH population and address the critical statewide shortage of trained individuals who can work to bridge the cultural and communication gap between health providers and their DHH patients.

The RICDHH HSTP team is being led by Christine West, a Rhode Island native and American Sign Language/English interpreter of over 25 years. In her role as Project Manager, she will work across the program, providing coordination and support in areas of outreach, collaboration, reporting, and training. She will provide supervision to other RICDHH HSTP staff and serve as the primary liaison to the RIC Principal Investigator and lead faculty member for the project, Dr. Marie Lynch. Christine will also work with Accountable Entities to ensure that behavioral and medical healthcare resources are updated and align with state and federal regulations, best practices and provisions in obtaining reasonable accommodations for the DHH population. Christine has a bachelor's degree in Deaf Studies from New York University and a master's degree in Deaf Education from San Diego State University. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Interpreting Studies and Communication Equity at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Thomas Darden, who has spent the past 19 years teaching K-12 students in communities around the country, is the team's acting Finance and Operations Coordinator. Thomas will manage the fiscal components of the grant, coordinate meetings and oversee program operations, including human resource functions, communications, and office support. Thomas holds a bachelor's degree from Brown University.

Alex Laferriere brings his skill set in media and film as the HSTP Outreach Coordinator. Raised by two Deaf parents, he is passionate about DHH culture. Alex has lived in RI for the past seven years, achieving a Master's in Public Affairs from Brown University. He will work across the program, providing training and outreach activities to AEs, other healthcare settings, insurer, professional association and other relevant partners as determined by project staff and other key stakeholders. Alex will lead development of workshops and presentations in AEs and other community settings. Working with the Communications Coordinator, he will develop and implement questionnaires, foster and maintain community partnerships, and create outreach materials that include social media to build a supportive DHH program community and culture.

Lyndsey Conway joins the team coming from working within the hospitality sector for over 10 years. As the Communications Coordinator, her focus will be working between RIC and RICDHH program staff, as well as conducting student outreach and recruitment for RIC's Public Health Interpreter Program. Collaborating with the Outreach Coordinator, Lyndsey will develop and implement questionnaires, foster and maintain community partnerships, and develop communication and outreach materials that include social media to build a supportive DHH program community and culture.

For more information on the RICDHH Healthcare System Transformation Project, please email cdhh.hstp@cdhh.ri.gov or follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.



Department of Administration Building, One Capitol Hill, Ground Level, Providence, RI
02908-5850 (401) 256-5511 (Voice or Videophone)(401) 222-5736 (FAX)
E-mail: cdhh.main@cdhh.ri.gov Website: www.cdhh.ri.gov